



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING




ANNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL P. FLANAGAN  
SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

September 30, 2005

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Mike Flanagan 

SUBJECT: Graduation Requirements Survey

During the past several months the State Board of Education has heard about the need to redesign and improve our high schools. We have all heard that Michigan "has no graduation requirements." Michigan is a state with a strong tradition of local control for all local governmental units including the school districts. Michiganians take pride in their unique locales and traditions.

However, we are cognizant of the need to educate our students to high standards so that they can become dynamic, creative, productive members of the global community. In a changing global environment the need for stringent educational requirements has become increasingly clear – we must equip our graduates with the skills they need to compete for the best jobs. As the Board prepares to give the Governor recommendations for high school graduation requirements, they have asked the Department to provide data about the graduation requirements that local school districts have imposed on their high school students.

Staff created a survey that was sent to all public school districts and public school academies. Although a 100% response was desired, we are heartened to see that 45% of our districts and PSAs responded to provide us with a representative sample of graduation requirements throughout the state. The results should serve to inform the discussion. A summary of the data is contained in the attachment for your information in preparation for the meeting on October 5, 2005.

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608 WEST ALLEGAN STREET • P.O. BOX 30008 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909  
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## Graduation Requirements Survey Summary Report

On September 9, 2005 the Superintendent sent an email to the 815 public school districts and public school academies asking them to complete a survey to describe their high school graduation requirements. The current School Code Master database shows that there are 569 K-12 districts and 78 public school academies that have high schools through grade 12 for a total of 647 possible respondents. Survey results were captured on September 22, 2005 to allow time to clean data and create displays. This summary is based on the 293 (45%) responses received by September 22, 2005.

Total number of public high schools in state: 744

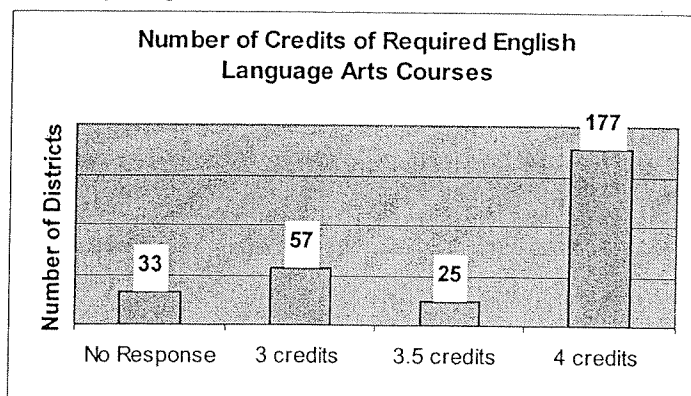
Survey respondents included suburban, rural, urban districts and our largest district. Of the school districts that responded, 83% had only one high school. In the state we have 82% of districts/PSAs that only have one high school, so the responses appear to be a representative sample for the state.

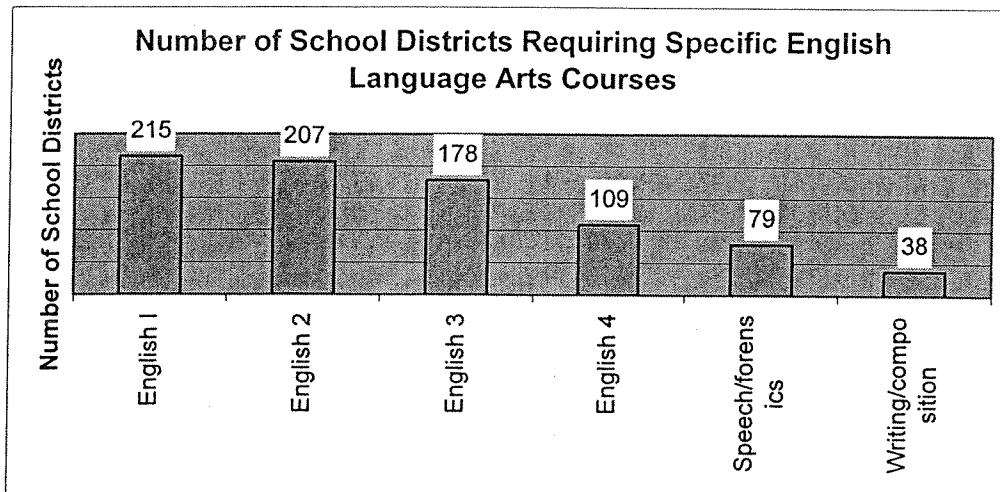
### General Conclusions

Two hundred ninety one (291) of the 293 survey completers indicated that they had specific course requirements for one or more courses for graduation and the requirements varied as described below. The graduation requirements generally met a common pattern of 4 years of English language arts, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of social studies and 2 years of science. In contrast, 113 of the responders indicated that they required no courses in the arts and 183 indicated that they do not require a world language. The charts below show the number, not the percent, of responders.

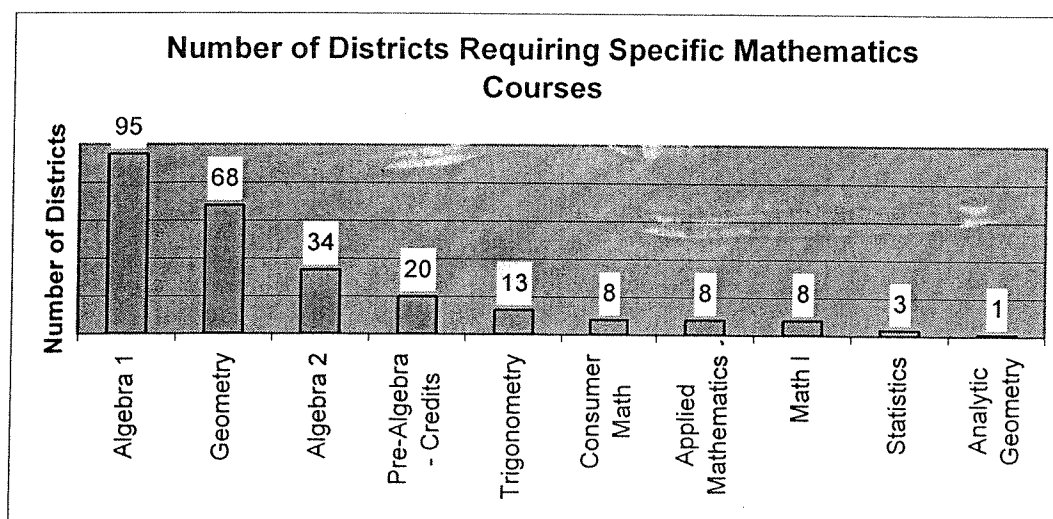
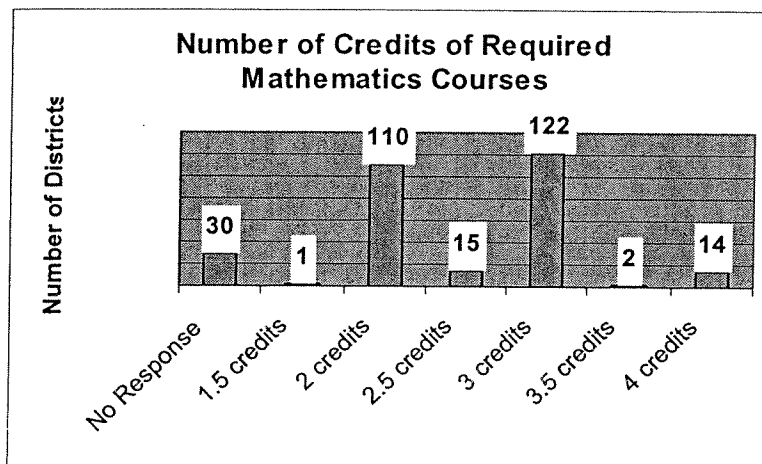
The number of credits required for graduation fell into a range from 18-45 and clustered around 21-29. In the survey a credit was defined as a course that met for a whole year. The number of credits required for graduation appears to cover a broad range, but some school districts use block scheduling in the high school and other credit earning configurations that produce 40-45 credit opportunities. The data seem to indicate that a substantial number of districts still use the Carnegie Unit method of counting credits.

### English Language Arts:

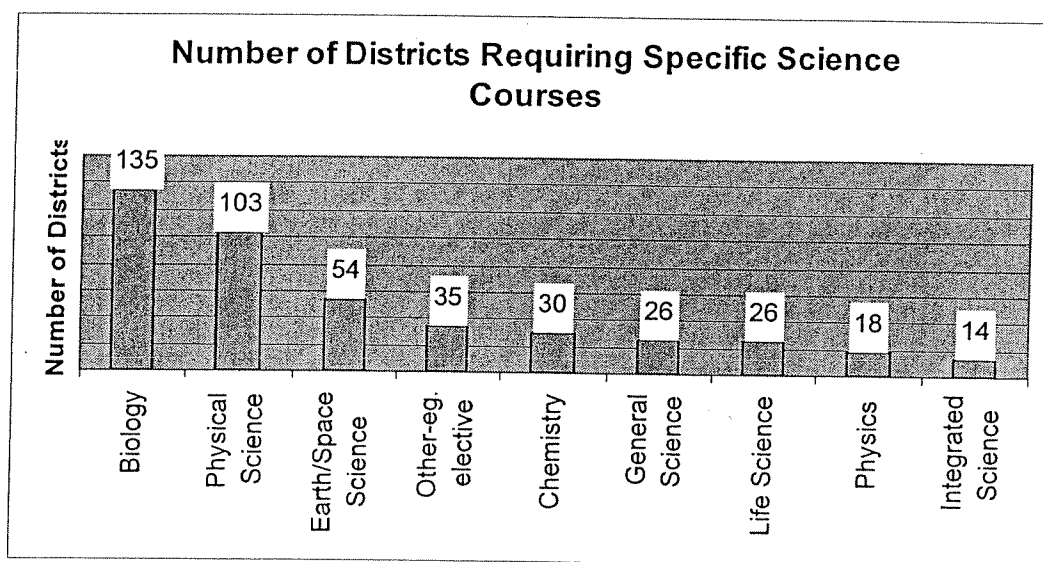
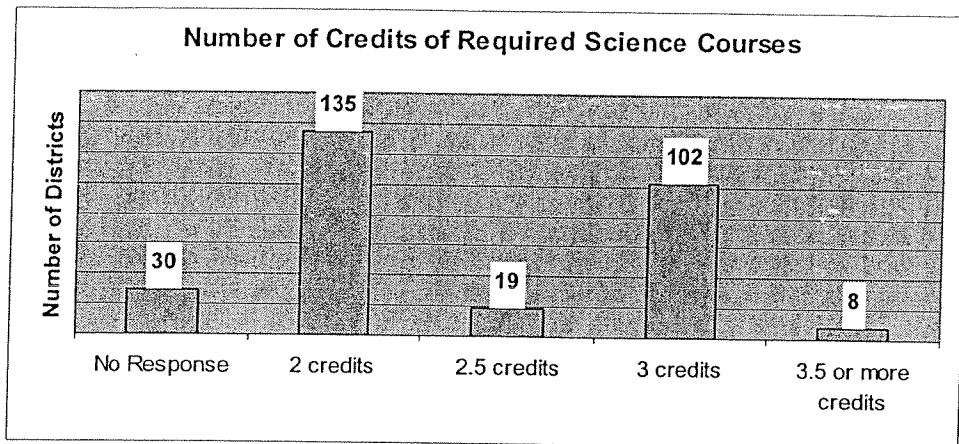




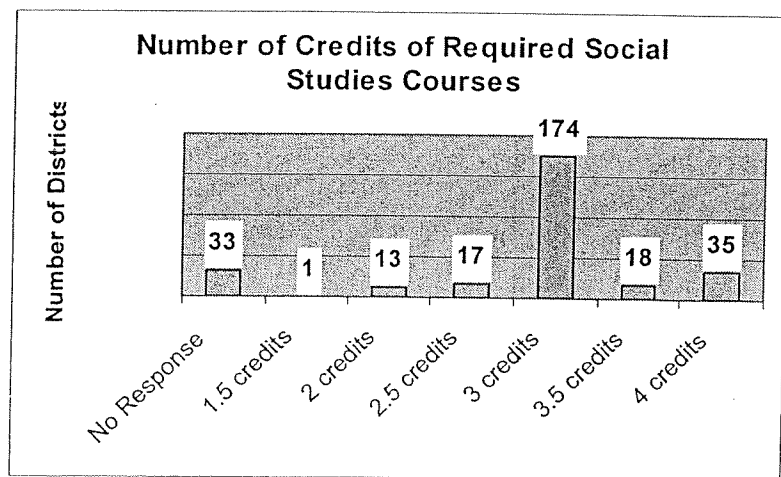
### Mathematics:

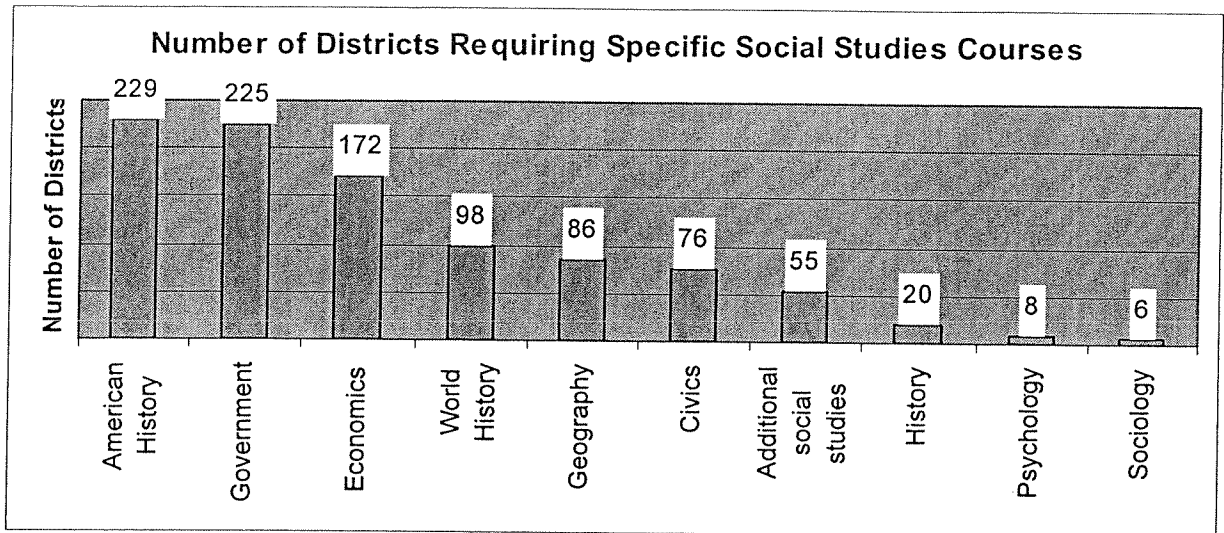


## Science:

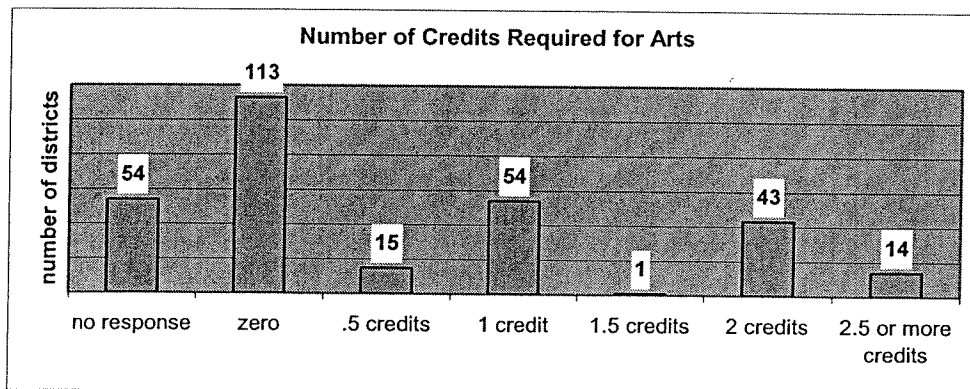


## Social Studies:

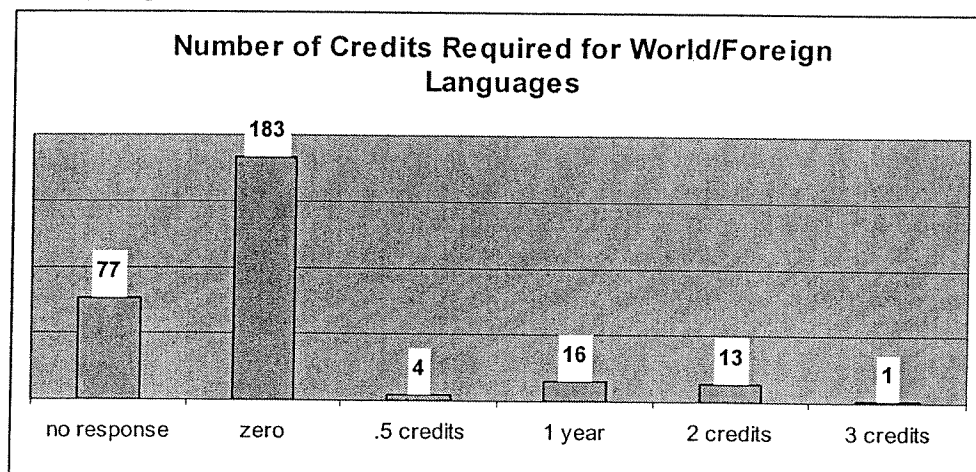




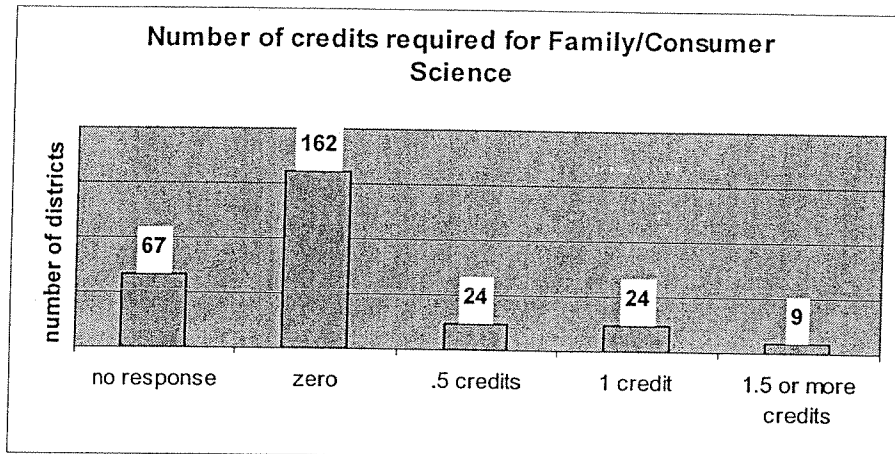
### Arts:



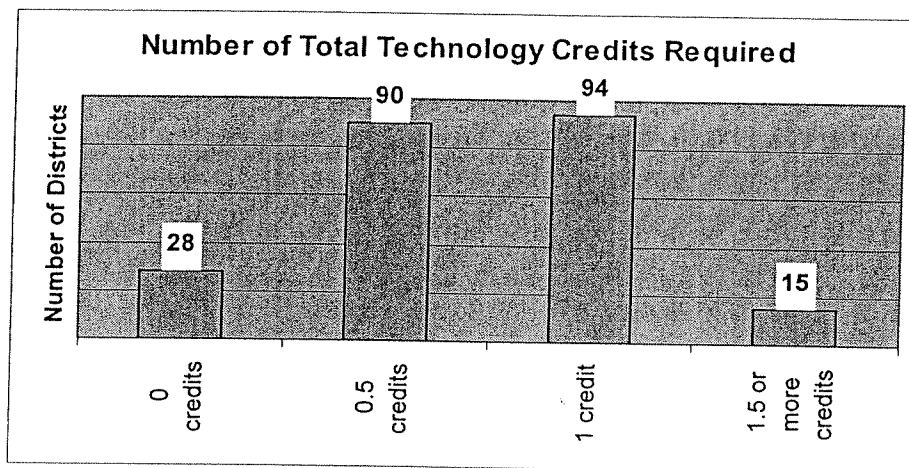
### World Languages:



### Family/Consumer Science:



### Technology courses:



Technology courses had a wide range of names, such as Computer Science, Computers, Computer Technology, and Business Technology. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the responders required at least one-half credit in technology.

Elective courses often included Career and Technical courses, Health Education, World Languages, Arts and a variety of specialized classes like Freshman Focus and ROTC. This indicates that many districts that do not *require* these credits still find them valuable and offer them to students.

### Other Survey Data:

The survey also asked about requirements for Health Education and Physical Education. Sixty six percent (66%) or 194 of the districts that responded required one-half credit of Health Education. Eighty-two percent or 239 of the responders required either one-half or one credit of Physical Education for graduation.

Around one fourth of all respondents require students to take an assessment before graduating. The assessments used included ACT, SAT, and the MEAP. Community Service was required by 77% of respondents; 7% conferred an enhanced diploma and only 20 respondents specified a minimum grade point average (GPA) for graduation – it was usually 1.5 or 1.6.

### **Observations:**

- While a common pattern of required credits in the core subjects is clearly apparent, there does not seem to be consensus around a specific curriculum that is expected of all students.
- Beyond the core subjects (English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies) there is no consistent pattern of expectations for arts, languages, technology, physical education, health and career preparation.
- Individual school districts/PSAs have implemented different ways of constructing instruction, such as block scheduling, dual enrollment and AP, but there is not a common structure. We must allow for flexibility to encourage innovation in this area.
- If any decision to change requirements is made that emphasizes science lab courses, schools will face a challenge in securing both highly qualified teachers and high quality lab facilities to handle the increased student demand.
- Technology requirements do not seem adequate to meet the needs of our changing work and education environment. Those needs can be met in a variety of ways other than specific course requirements, such as integrating technology use across the curriculum or through career exploration.
- A lack of required assessments and required minimum GPA seems to indicate a reduced expectation for graduates.